

MONITOR AUDIO PLATINUM PL100

Compact speakers with a big, generous sound

The flagship small speakers from an acclaimed manufacturer are special, says Andrew Everard

The smallest speakers in Monitor Audio's range-topping Platinum line-up are very small indeed. However, a hint that the £2500-a-pair PL100s are something special is given by the weight – they're 13kg apiece, suggesting a cabinet of excellent solidity and rigidity. But take the grilles off and you see what really sets the PL100s apart from conventional "bookshelf" speakers: they use a ribbon driver for the treble, and a mid/bass unit looking for all the world like an aluminium dish set in a rubber surround.

Both drivers are designed and made for this speaker – no small undertaking when it comes to constructing a ribbon tweeter. This uses a very thin sandwich of Monitor Audio's Ceramic Coated Aluminium Magnesium (C-CAM) alloy and rare-earth magnets, with every part of the ribbon being both voice coil and diaphragm. The ribbon itself weighs almost nothing, and is good for frequencies all the way up to 100kHz.

Partnering it is a 16.5cm mid/bass unit using the company's Rigid Driver Technology (RDT). This employs layers of the C-CAM material sandwiching a Nomex honeycomb to make a diaphragm that's both rigid and very light, and it's mounted in an ultra-rigid die-cast chassis.

So, we have C-CAM and RDT, to which we can now add ARC – the mineral-loaded resin forming the front baffle – and the Hi-Ve II rear-venting reflex port, both shallow and rifled on its inner surface to accelerate the air-flow.

The cabinet itself is made from multiple layers of wood veneers, bonded together and shaped to give a non-regular enclosure – good for avoiding standing waves – and within there's bitumen damping and bolts connecting the front and rear panels to internal bracing, torqued up to optimise the rigidity of the cabinet. The front baffle, meanwhile, is hand-upholstered in Strathspey leather – mainly for aesthetic reasons, though it does also add some damping. Completing the



The PL100s are set apart by their unusual driver configuration and luxury finishes

picture is a pair of custom-made stands, selling for £400 a pair, to which the speakers attach. You can use conventional stands – 60cm or so tall would do the job – but the speakers sound better on the dedicated supports.

PERFORMANCE

These are not speakers to be partnered with anything but the very best sources and amplification: they're not in any way shape or form forgiving. They're not sweet, they're not rich – they're just neutral, and very revealing.

However, partner them with a balanced, high-quality system, and they will thrill like no other speakers of this size I have ever encountered. The bass is powerful and has good impact, with a little boundary reinforcement doing the low-end response no harm whatsoever, though you

should take care not to use them too close to rear or side walls if the bass isn't to become too loose.

The crossover point between the ribbon driver and the mid/bass unit is quite low at 2.8kHz but this gives the PL100s seamless integration across the frequency range. The treble is more pronounced than on many a rival design but this adds to the open and explicit nature of these speakers, and enables them to deliver a sound with almost magical ambience and atmosphere.

These are speakers with real speed and attack, as is clear with solo instruments, and a glorious sense of presence with well recorded studio or location ambient information. Stereo focus is sharp and entirely natural, and these little speakers are able to create entirely credible sound stage pictures with just a shade of toe-in towards the listening position. But almost as impressive is the way they give a fine impression of the scale of larger musical forces, thanks to their excellent weight and bass presentation.

No, the PL100s aren't for everyone, as you might expect given what is after all a high price for speakers so compact. But if you can afford them, and the partnering equipment required to make the most of them, they're a superb choice. **C**

MONITOR AUDIO PLATINUM PL100

Type Two-way bass-reflex standmount speakers

Price £2500

Drive units Ribbon tweeter, 16.5cm mid/bass unit

Frequency response 42Hz-100kHz

Sensitivity 88dB/W/m

Impedance 4 ohms

Maximum power handling 120W

Minimum amplifier power 50W

Finishes Santos rosewood or ebony veneer, or piano black, all lacquered and with leather baffle upholstery

Dimensions (HxWxD) 37x22.5x28.5cm

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